



# Meeting Notes

## Landscape Focus Group Meeting

**9:00 a.m. – Tuesday, July 21, 2009**

APS Conference Room, 101 West Cherry Ave, Flagstaff, AZ

1. Welcome and Introductions

Meeting was called to order by Chair Gary Nelson at 9:05 a.m.

In attendance:

Ed Larsen, City of Flagstaff  
Nigel Sparks, Landscape architect  
Gary Nelson Citizen  
Randy Groth, City of Flagstaff  
Jeff Stein, Landscape architect  
Roger Eastman, City of Flagstaff  
Carol Babbitt Citizen  
Elaine Averitt, City of Flagstaff  
Dan Anderson, Landscape architect  
Michael O'Leary, Landscape architect

2. Overview of the purpose of the Landscape Focus Group.

3. Discussion: Comments by the Group were:

- Beautification.

- Encourage neighborhoods to improve landscaping
- Uniformity – match landscape design from one project to another; and from one area/neighborhood to another
- Ensure new landscaping is compatible with the surrounding area
- May be a “non-issue” – beautification (which is subjective) will result from enhanced landscape standards

- Planting Standards (and sustainability issues again)

- A sub-committee is evaluating the City's plant lists – it help designers from out of the area to understand what will work in Flagstaff
- Encourage the planting of ground covers rather than the use of extensive areas of rock as tends to be the practice now.
- Rather than allowing areas of turf it would be better to define grasses instead.
- Suggestion that we include a requirement for an improved soil to be brought onto a development site to mitigate the impacts of construction (concrete spills, compaction, etc.). This would at least give the new plants a chance to survive.

- Explore the possibility of building inspectors doing more post construction landscape review/inspection to assist the PDS staff who are limited in resources.
- Consider developing a check list – soil depth, plant species, irrigation, etc. to help with on-site review of landscaping before the installation is approved. Also check the holes before planting to ensure that the plants will survive.
- Over a certain threshold limit – require a landscape architect. Put the onus on the landscape architect to ensure that the plants are correctly planted and placed.
- Stagger different sizes of plant material to ensure there is variety in the final landscape product. But the group agreed smaller plants are more sustainable and would have a lower mortality rate – this goes against the notion of staggering sizes. Issue may need to be thought of based on the size of the project.
- Need a code that takes us away from landscaping by the numbers and towards more creative landscape design. Again, set thresholds over which a landscape architect is hired to do the design and oversee installation.
- Randy G. – rather than do a laundry list of landscape materials, state what should not be used; allow landscape architect more flexibility as a result.
- Nigel – at the larger City level and the site level, first, look at grade and drainage and use this as a determinant of landscape design by attempting to contain natural flows as much as possible.
  - Thinking about long term sustainability – but be careful that these visionary ideas do not stomp on American freedom and property rights?
  - Soils are often compacted so water puddles and does not drain. Address in the code (see above).
  - In areas of the City where natural drainages can be contained and stored (e.g. Switzer Canyon Wash), establish a different landscape palette than elsewhere where irrigation is provided, i.e. landscape standards are based on water availability.
  - Suggest that we do not need plant lists – plant whatever you can based on water demand (rainwater, etc.) Should no longer be using drinking water for landscaping – 50 years from now this will seem preposterous!
  - How will the City's zoning code transition to accommodate these concepts?
- Communal water collection to support community gardens – needs to be addressed in the Regional Plan as well.
- Transect of water use – more urban uses potable water; more rural transects use captured water. Walmart is using rainwater capture to irrigate landscaping.

- Code should require water harvesting rather than irrigation systems based on potable water. E.g. Tucson – 50% of water use comes from water harvesting.
- Conflict in community values – there is often a community desire for street trees with large canopies as in other parts of the country, but this is not possible without lots of water. Yet the community also wants more sustainable street landscape design. But large street canopies may be OK in areas like Old Townsite where the Rio provides a water source.
- Downtown landscaping makes the downtown look like anywhere USA. We should promote a more local landscape palette that is unique to Flagstaff – plant trees that can be sustained on their own in the long term after short term irrigation.
- If a landscape architect is hired, provide more leniency on the plant palette based on good design rather than “planting by the numbers”. Appropriate for large projects – smaller projects have more restrictive standards. Important to have a minimum standard because some developers would not add landscaping if they could.
- Suggestion that a developer emphasize public right-of-way landscaping to improve the streetscape in a new project or subdivision. Developer of each parcel then would have a lesser need for landscaping on that parcel.
- General discussion on the notion that the new zoning code needs to transition to the reality of less water;
  - For example, do not have raised landscaping and address water harvesting by lowering landscape areas
  - Define landscape in terms of restoration – use plant lists for specific areas of the City;
  - Define canopy areas for parking areas.
  - Need to tie these ideas into the LID requirements of the City – make it more available to landscape architects. (Need to ensure that the new requirements are not more expensive – prove that rainwater harvesting is less expensive than installation of irrigation). Intent is to create a water based code.
- Community gardens
  - Edible landscapes should be encouraged in sheet run-off areas in all new developments and at a local community gardens
  - Encourage more community gardens on City and other public lands – especially where run-off can be captured and utilized
  - Encourage community gardens on commercial developments and multi-family developments as part of the open space requirement (more usable public open space – e.g. in RM-M-E and UC). Allow community gardens in more zones as useful open space.
  - Need to address maintenance issues in the long term – what if the garden is left in an unproductive state?

- Think about liability issues with community gardens on private (e.g. commercial developments). Probably easily resolved through waivers.
- Also needs to be addressed at the Regional Plan level.
- Consistency
  - Need consistency between all City landscape plant lists and within all City documents
  - LID needs to be integrated with the planting components of plant lists
  - This will result in continuity through out the City.
- Street Trees (snow removal coordination)
  - Landscaping in the parkway often damaged by snow storage and trees are frequently damaged by the plows
  - Cinders are an on-going problem to landscape areas – use black rock mulch rather than red rock mulch as a possible solution.
  - Colorado – list of salt tolerant plants could be useful (Honey Locust is one). Get this from Elaine.
- Parking lots and landscaping
  - Consensus that we should use less rock mulch than we do now
  - Rather use natural grasses to resist weed growth in the long term
  - Should espouse the LID standards – more natural in design. Will become drainage areas and landscaping will follow suit.
  - Suggestion - if permeable pavement is provided, why not offer an incentive to require less landscaping?
  - Connect landscape areas within the parking area so that surface water can be channeled and collected and used for on-site retention to water to plants – less off-site water flow as a result.
  - Discussion on allowing more permeable materials such as gravel in parking areas. Inconclusive – to be picked up again at next meeting.

4. Next Meeting: July 28, 2009 at 9:00 a.m.

5. Adjournment: 10:40 a.m.